

How Mindfulness Strengthens Us by Piya Tan

At the end of a meditation sitting, I always tell the class to “review your practice,” like what the forest monks do, too. To review your practice is basically to recall the peace, joy or focus you felt, even for an instant, during the meditation. The idea is not to “think” but to “feel” it, and to remember it.

This way, as more and more happy thoughts build up in us, our negative thoughts are displaced, and have less chances of controlling and autopilotting us through negative habits.

Dhyana (or jhana) is great if you can attain it (it’s like running as a marathon or sporting in the Olympics). But, you need not get into dhyana to be happy. Sometimes people take dhyana like some kind of championship medal, and keep training for it, as it were, so that they forget to “enjoy” (en-joy, feel the joy) of the sitting in the present moment.

In meditation, the journey itself is the destination. Or, another way of putting it, we simply learn to walk by walking.

The idea of meditating is to ENJOY the present-moment awareness. This easier to do when you make extra effort to let go of thoughts about your work, your relationships, your religion, and most of all, about your self. In other words, you begin to meditate by simply forgetting about your self, about the past or the future.

A very simple way to meditate is to imagine yourself to be a security guard of a very high-security building. You have six monitors (your six senses), and you look carefully at each of them, one at a time. The interesting thing here is you remove the difficulty or danger simply by paying close attention to it, that’s all. And you must not move away from the safety of your seat.

You see something on the EYE monitor: “just looking, just looking”; let it come, let it go.

You hear something on the EAR monitor: “sound, sound”; let it come, let it go.

You smell something on the NOSE monitor: “smelling, smelling”; let it come, let it go.

You taste something on the TONGUE monitor: “tasting, tasting”; let it come, let it go.

You feel something on the BODY monitor: “feeling, feeling”; let it come, let it go.

You experience a thought on the MIND monitor: “thinking, thinking”; let it come, let it go.

Every time your attention wanders, immediately bring it back to the breath (if you are doing breath meditation). After doing this for a while, you will notice your breath becoming more relaxed and slower: you need less oxygen, you burning up or decaying more slowly, as it were! (Notice how much oxygen you burn when you get angry.)

As you breathe more calmly, you will notice gaps or spaces between your breaths. In-breath...a gap...out-breath...a gap...and so on. These are SPACES OF STILLNESS, the source of inner joy and higher creativity. This is the silence between the musical notes of life.

Keep watching these still spaces in between your breaths, and a wonderful stillness will arise in you.

While the storm rages in the world around us, may we find joyful stillness in the centre of our breaths.

Whatever religion you follow, you will find that this stillness helps you know yourself better. I share this with you out of immeasurable lovingkindness and for a more peaceful productive society.

The highest religion is TRUE INNER STILLNESS.

by Piya Tan © 17th Sep 2008